

СТЕФАН ПАМУКОВ

ПОРТРЕТЪТ НА ЯВОРОВ

A PORTRAIT OF YAVOROV



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1991

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STEPHAN PAMUKOV

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A CHILD OF THE BLACK EARTH OF THRACE

See p. At the time when Yavorov¹ was establishing his talent
5 as a poet and interest in him was growing, a legend started
going around among the Kracholov family which the poet
himself came to believe. It traced the beginning of the
Kracholov family back to an Arab from Anatolia, a tall,
dark, brooding man, who mysteriously appeared in the
town of Chirpan, having suddenly amassed a fortune – it
is not known how – but a fortune which was spent in the
6 early years of this century. It is hardly likely that the
family's early history will ever be accurately documented.
However, there is one thing we can be sure of, and that
is that the poet's great-grandfather, legend aside, was a
child of the Black Earth of Thrace, his face tanned by the
southern sun.

That was what made the literary critic Petko Rossen
so certain that Yavorov 'was very much a Slav.'

We get an accurate picture of his father from Mihail
Arnaudov², a portrait that is surprisingly close to Yavorov's
7 own: '...a tall old man, with a dark, almost yellowish
complexion, with slightly protruding eyes and thick lips.'
As far as his mother was concerned, the 'only resemblance
we can find is in their characters, in her love for folk
songs and for reading, which left a lasting mark on the

¹ Pseudonym of Peyo Kracholov (1878–1914): one of Bulgaria's greatest poets, comparable only in poetic force to the genius Botev.

² Mihail Arnaudov (1878–1978): a prominent Bulgarian professor and member of the Academy of Sciences. Doctor Emeritus of Heidelberg and Muenster Universities. A close friend of Yavorov, about whose life he later wrote a book.

poet. Everything else, her pale skin, her blue sparkling eyes and her fair hair were in complete contrast with her son's physical features.

When the future poet was born, his father was satisfied by his son's resemblance to him. The only thing he did not
8 know was that his child would grow up brooding, immersed in a world which will always remain unknown to us, for Yavorov never wished to remember it or describe it. Years later, others of his age would describe him as closed, nervous, adamant and deeply sensitive. He was more interested in animals than in people, he surrounded himself with them, and even the first photograph we have of him is of him sitting on his favourite donkey, belonging to his father. His face is serious but childishly good-natured, standing out against the dark background. His fi-
9 gure appears frozen, as if sculpted. Fifteen years would go by, and the poet would return to this first record of him, made by the eminent photographer of Southern Bulgaria Stoyan Katsarov. The background must have seemed to him excessively dark and gloomy for his childhood years, which is why he ordered that it be replaced by an idyllic landscape. Who carried out this order? A careful look at the backdrop reveals that it didn't belong to a professional photographer. This is confirmed by the signature, one of the letters of which we can distinguish as a W, enabling
10 us to discover the name of Wolz. He was the one who made Yavorov's portrait the way he wanted it, giving it more light and more vitality.

This portrait marks a turning-point between Peyo Yavorov's early childhood, when he was more a passive contemplator of the world, and his later school years, when a certain change began to appear in his character.

THE 'WONDROUS FUTURE POET'

11 However much talk there might be of an artisan's tradition in the Kracholov home, where everything was subjected to the father's steady hand, his burning temperament and unbending will, the nascent poet grew up under the benign warmth of the family hearth. Here songs were sung and legends were told, stories were read of Benkovski and Garibaldi and Botev, all of which filled the mind and the
12 imagination of the highly impressionable Yavorov. It is not surprising that these impressions frequently led to hallucinations and strange visions. Ghosts became part of his world, a strange world in which reality and fantasy mixed, a world which no one else could hope to look into. His spirit was like a taetened string, or a metronome which reacts to the slightest touch. Away from home, a hint of the unknown made him insecure and timid.

13 From that period we have the only family portrait, where the traditional positions of the family members reveal patriarchal harmony and satisfaction. The hands on the parents' shoulders express both their love for them and their reliance on them for security, but something else is important for Peyo Kracholov: he has not forgotten his book, something that would always accompany him from now on.

Yavorov's sensitive nature was incapable of tolerating the slightest use of force. Once he ran away from school, his self-esteem wounded, while another time he took a piece of rope to hang himself with after his father had
14 unfairly hit him. As the years passed he became increasingly indifferent to the games of the others, simply observing them, 'leaning against the wall, a dreamy look in his eyes.'

When he reached the higher classes at school, however, he changed. The atmosphere of school seems to have influenced him, and his inner contradictions flared up, be-

cause we see him in an unknown state: always melancholy and dreaming, as if now he is no longer merely watching the games of the others, but taking part in them; no longer avoiding his schoolmates, but choosing them. N. Filipov, 15 who knew Yavorov closely during this period, adds: 'And none of our group suspected that this modest lad, simply dressed, with a dark face and pitch-black hair, concealed the spirit of the wondrous future poet and Macedonian revolutionary.' That was when the famous photographer Dimiter Karastoyanov took a group portrait in which the 'wondrous future poet' is standing in the last row.

The photograph was taken in the uncertain days of Stambolov's³ regime, when the ideals of the National Re- 16 vival were forgotten and all free thinkers were persecuted for reacting against the dictatorship in one way or another. So Yavorov started to concern himself with the injustices of the world; he tried to explain the roots of good and evil, and associated with socialists. So it is highly likely that Karastoyanov's portrait shows us this new milieu which Yavorov joined in Plovdiv, a milieu in which there were ardent debates on the problems of the age, when socialism was something novel, and its ideas were discussed with the fire of enthusiastic spirits.

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN TRUTH AND LIE

17 Old Kracholov was a stingy man, and this had serious consequences for the future poet. Without any regard for his intellectual strivings, he deprived him of a schooling and imposed his own philosophy of life on the boy. This

³ Stefan Stambolov (1854–1895): poet, revolutionary and statesman. In the reign of Prince Ferdinand he was viciously murdered by hired killers. His first biography, published soon after his death, was written by the British scholar Beeman.

decision, of course, was not imposed without opposition, if we bear in mind what great hopes his illiterate mother
18 pinned on education, and their son's firm character. At the cost of great inner suffering, his spirit totally depressed, he had to learn the 'silver trade' of telegraph operator and resign himself to his fate. The poet's sister Ekaterina best described the poet's state at that time: 'From his very first day at the telegraph station he seemed to be like a prisoner in chains.' His will-power was put to the test, as he had to work twenty-four hour shifts, without fresh air or a minute's respite. A strange cry came from his breast:
19 'Here I am as if in a grave. Snowstorms have buried everything around me, and there isn't a living soul for me to say a word to. I am losing my human form! I am dying!'

His inner conflict had now come to the fore. He walked past people like a shadow, and at the same time yearned to open his heart to somebody. He felt he was dying, and at the same time realised he was growing. He could see no way out, but at the same time read, wrote and struggled. 'I fear for myself', he once confessed to Peyo Garvalov, while at the same time he believed in his future
20 as a poet. This was the Yavorov Professor Shishmanov remembered at their first meeting, when the young poet wanted to become an actor. He was 'a thin, slightly stooped lad, with a dark, swarthy face, large brown sparkling eyes and jet-black hair.' This description was confirmed by Peter Alekov, whom Yavorov befriended in Straldja: 'Tall, stooping, dark.' Alekov tells us something more about the poet. We know that he had a weakness for Lermontov. We also know that he did not like reciting in front of
21 other people. But Lermontov's *Demon* often tempted him, and often, standing as if frozen to the spot, obsessed by the spirit of exile, he would render the fiery confession of the devil with a clear voice and passionate gesticulation.

Yavorov had a complex, disharmonious character, and was not the kind of person who could be understood at

first glance. Even along association with him rarely gave one an insight into his character, concealed as it was behind the icy wall of silence. He could not tolerate noise, not even the sound of children's laughter, while at the same time he would go into ecstasy over a song that happened to penetrate his loneliness and touch his inner spirit. The
22 strange telegraph-operator in Sliven made a strong impression on Teodora Hajidimitrova: 'When the Christmas waits finished their song and made to go, the window opened with a crash, and the dark demonic figure appeared, taller than ever, shouting: 'Sing, boys!' And he himself started singing in his deep voice.'

When we look at a photograph taken of him in those years, Yavorov does not look demonic or terrible at all.
23 His hands crossed in reconciliation, he looks at us in deep human sorrow. He expresses the collapse of his ideals, the breaking of his dreams 'somewhere there in between the truth and the lie'. What is remarkable in this photograph are his eyes. They are not merely sorrowful. His expression seems to be torn between two different things, expressing concealed inner experiences, the conflict between the search for a new religion and his hard everyday life. In this portrait Yavorov looks especially delicate. This can be seen not only by the oval form of his face, but also by his hands, with their long, thin fingers and the fine shape of the hand, which lends even greater delicacy to the pose.

24 Having separated from the socialist movement, he had no hope for the future, no altar at which to pray and reveal himself. His soul was troubled, and filled with fear, and only his dreams took him into 'desert heights'. Yavorov was a resigned demon in Sliven, and an eccentric in Anchialo, where he was a shadow by the sea. His deep feelings for the school-teacher Nonka Chipeva further stirred up the poet's confused emotions. She was a serious, restrained young woman with a fine voice. She played the
25 mandolin, sang Russian romances and recited poems by

Puchkin, Lermontov and Nekrasov. She also dreamed enthusiastically of the future, captivated by the ideas of early socialism, which shows us why Yavorov's feelings were so strong, feelings which he expressed in a series of wonderful works which he wrote at this period, including *Calliope*. It is not surprising that later he confessed to Alexander Paskalev that in writing *Two Lovely Eyes*, her eyes kept appearing before him, even though the inspiration for the poem had been his love for Mina. But Nonka Chipeva did not wish to follow him on his difficult path, and so the poet remained again in his 'dark, lonely wilderness.'

His photograph from Anhialo gives us further insight into Yavorov. When he wrote his *Eccentric*, he had himself in mind. It was an accurate self-appraisal, which nicely fits his physical portrait: 'Haggard, sunken cheeks, deep furrows on his gloomy brow – those are quite clearly the remains of cruel trials and tribulations.'

What we cannot see is the 'passionate, rebellious, suffering breast', but this vast world of feelings are revealed in his poetry, which were to bring him fame as a poet of the highest rank.

FIRST MEETING WITH THE AUTHOR OF *CALLIOPE*

Although in the initial stages of his artistic development Yavorov was unable to find a permanent set of artistic values and ideas, his first poems exuded an unusual artistic power. They made him famous overnight, surprising such minds from the Parnassus of the literary journal

29 *Missul* such as Dr. Krustev⁴ and Pencho Slaveikov.⁵ They published his works as he wrote them, wondering that such a 'dark child of the provinces' could achieve such artistic heights. They christened him beneath the cupola of their aesthetic circle, and suddenly the anonymous clerk from Anhialo became Yavorov. Again with Dr. Krustev's intervention, he moved to Sofia, and the twenty-two-year-old poet entered the circle of the forbidding heights of *Missul*. However, he entered not with pride and self-confidence, but confused and hesitant, with all the anxieties and doubts that underlay his tragic nature.

30 It seems that the high priests of *Missul* were disappointed by their first meeting with the author of *Calliope*. Their illusory preconceptions of the romantic poet evidently did not fit in with the reality. Even Dr. Krustev's maid did not want to admit him at their first meeting, because he was not 'fashionably-dressed' enough. Todor Vlaikov⁶ remembered him on that day: '...a high forehead,

⁴ Krustyo Krustev (1866–1919): studied philosophy under Wundt at Leipzig and did a doctorate on 'The Metaphysical Concept of the Spirit according to Lotze', later a teacher at the Higher School in Sofia (today Sofia University). Dr. Krustev was a renowned Bulgarian critic, and one of the four members of the *Missul* Literary Circle, along with Pencho Slaveikov, Petko Todorov and Yavorov. He outlived all three of them, who died at an early age.

⁵ Pencho Slaveikov (1866–1912): an outstanding poet who studied philosophy at Leipzig, where he had a penchant for the lectures of Volkelt and Wundt, at the same time being strongly influenced by such great minds as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. At the beginning of the century he was director of the National Library, and then of the National Theatre in Sofia. Dismissed unfairly by the opponents of his ideas, he went into exile and died in Como Brunate, Italy.

⁶ Todor Vlaikov (1865–1943): the most prominent spokesman for populism in Bulgaria. While a student at Moscow University, he was attracted by the philosophy of Tolstoy and the doctrines of the Russian liberal populist Nikolai Mikhailovski. As a story-writer Vlaikov influenced a number of authors such as Anton Strashimirov, Elin Pelin

with big, black, flashing eyes, which often look downwards.' Yavorov stood before them silently, with a shy smile, although his eyes betrayed 'strength and tenacity'.

- 31 Nikola Danchov believed that the poet's smile came from his 'inner goodness', and although it made him look handsome, it added mystery to what he said. In her memoirs, Svetoslava Slaveikova said, 'Yavorov often came to the Slaveikov's home. He would always sit down in a corner and say nothing.' Secretive and mysterious is what he was to many of his contemporaries. Even to Pencho Slaveikov the poet always remained an enigma.

- 32 Yavorov often surprised those he met with his strange ways. His feelings came quickly and forcefully, taking everyone by surprise, for they were not within the bounds of what was normal for human beings. Danchov also describes him as a fatalist. When he had just moved to Sofia, the poet entered his room unexpected and, seeing a revolver on the table, grabbed it and pointed it at his temple. 'If I have any days left to live, this gun will not go off,' he said, and pale and trembling, pulled the trigger. Fortunately the gun was not loaded.

- 33 But what really kept Yavorov apart from the rest, and what captivated them, was his tremulous voice. He spoke from the heart, and in his speech one could always distinguish a certain melody, a certain rhythm. This is confirmed by Dora Gabe⁷, who was one of his closest circle at that time: 'Only his voice was beautiful,' she admitted. 'More than beautiful – it was a warm, soft voice which revealed the poet's inner charm. I remember Yavorov at

and Yordan Yovkov. He wrote a three-volume set of memoirs entitled, *Experienced*, which death did not allow him to complete.

⁷ Dora Gabe (1886–1983): a well-known Bulgarian poetess. She went to high school at Varna and continued her education at Sofia, Geneva and Grenoble. Yavorov dedicated a considerable number of intimate poems to her.

that time by his voice.' Yavorov gave her his photograph from 1905, which is one of his more successful portraits. Almost his entire face is lit up, and seems to be illuminated by inspired thoughts. He has been captured at an unusual moment of expectation, and of closeness.

Mara Belcheva has left us an accurate psychological portrait of Yavorov: 'Something strange emanates from this man. His hand is unsure, when he puts it in yours he almost immediately withdraws it. His expression is timid and dark as night, and he rarely looks one in the eyes. When you say something to him, he gives short replies and lapses into silence again.'

From Yavorov's years in the *Missul* circle, we have two almost identical photographs of him among the four literary giants of his time, made, like the portrait he presented to Dora Gabe, in Wolz's studio. In both he is standing in the background, and his pose is quite simple and natural. What strikes one most is the unusual vividness of his image and the power of his intellect that comes across. His eyes are particularly expressive. He does not try to hide them, as is usually the case, but they are exposed and wide open; however, they still do not allow anyone else to 'see into their secret'.

In the other portrait Yavorov is standing, his head bowed slightly and his eyes looking off into space, as if he is far away from the *Missul* circle. This is to be expected; however much this circle helped Yavorov to become established as a poet, he was unable to accept his mentors' ideas concerning the 'chosen individual'. Even Slaveikov had stopped liking Yavorov recently, because he was not a 'man of the world'. 'Let him keep the company only of rebels and outlaws. There he is free,' concluded Slaveikov, unwilling to pursue this mystery any further, or to follow the poet along his 'paths unknown.'

A DEDICATED REVOLUTIONARY

37 Yavorov's striving to 'penetrate into the dark abysses' of the mind reveals two aspects of his inner self. Both the angel and the devil fought irreconcilably within him, and he suffered greatly because of this division: 'In my breast they breathe flames and flame dries me out.' This is a reflection of real life, where evil fought with the ideals of the mind.

38 The poet's struggle was not only confined to his inner self, but also to the world around him. He saw it in his contacts with Armenians, and in the deeds of his closest friends who had dedicated themselves to the liberation of Macedonia. He then realised that outside the 'dark confines of the womb' there was another darkness, which urged him to action. Yavorov had found his religion, a religion that almost cost him his life. It was not a mere pose, or a desire to imitate Hristo Botev, but a supreme experience of lofty sentiment.

39 His stay in Macedonia was not without difficulties, but the poet had strength. Mihail Chakov in whose rebel detachment Yavorov was first enrolled, wrote: 'We knew who was among us and treated him like a god.'

Yavorov's first photograph as a member of and propagandist for the cause of Macedonian freedom from Turkish rule was taken in Popov's studio in Yambol, and he gave it to his fellow-revolutionary Garvalov, with the laconic legend: 'Peyo for Peyo.' One can feel his strength and pride. He had become a man of the world, was sure
40 of himself, and harsh. He had evidently found the 'impetus of ideas', that fateful 'outburst of feelings and passion.' Vassil Neichev was the first to notice the change in him: 'He had a small pointed beard, which highlighted the dark colour of his chin.'

Just two months later he again stood before a camera, this time with two contributors to the newspaper *Delo*, on

whose pages he had expounded his passionate defence of the oppressed and made a name for himself as an outstanding political journalist. Neichev gives the portrait its finishing touches: 'Thin, straight features, and although he
41 looked dark, he was a handsome man.'

A. Vladikov took two photographs in the space of an hour. During that time only Yavorov hasn't changed his place. In one of the shots his arm is on the shoulder of his comrade G. P. Stamatov, while in the other picture he shows with a single gesture his attitude towards the prominent revolutionary M. Gerjikov. The poet once told Professor Zlatarov that only Gerjikov and a handful like
42 him 'know the price of real things, for which it is worth living and dying.'

Yavorov crossed the border several times, longing not so much for a heroic feat as for death in the name of a sublime ideal. Whenever he spoke of Macedonia, his eyes radiated passion, fire and faith. The revolutionaries whom he knew closely give the same description, even though they describe him in different ways. In their eyes Yavorov was a dedicated man.

But the poet changed entirely after the defeat of the
43 Ilinden uprising and the death of Gotse Delchev;⁸ disillusioned, crushed, his spirit broken, his world was once again haunted by ghosts and death. His mind again wandered blindly, and he lost everything 'down to the last dream in my heart', destroying everything to 'the bright star in the sky'.

Despite his deep depression, years later Yavorov returned to the fate of Macedonia. Although he was leader of a rebel detachment, he had a 'gentle hand and a tender heart.' What he lacked was Sandanski's relentless severity.

⁸ Gotse Delchev (1872-1903): the most outstanding revolutionary and fighter for the liberation of Macedonia from the Turks. In 1903 Yavorov wrote a biography of him which was published the following year.

44 He was quite different in Kavalla. Only two months had passed, but he was now unrecognisable. We can see this in the portrait taken by the Greek photographer Papahristodoulou. He is wearing his rebel outfit, surrounded by his men, armed, bearded, grim. Holding his rifle in both hands, he sits restlessly, his eyes looking into the distance.

Yavorov is described in a very lifelike way by his subordinate Georgi Venedikov. It was he who has helped us to identify the members of the detachment and get an idea
45 of the poet's last days in the Macedonian movement. Yavorov's mind worked strangely then. He took events of the past too deeply. In the village of Banitsa he was handed the skulls of Gotse Delchev and Goushtanov, which he took with tears in his eyes. Upset and excited, he stroked the forehead of the father of the revolution, deep in silence. At that moment he was probably not thinking of the wiles of fate, but of the cause itself and the man who had influenced it so much and shone like a meteor in the sky over oppressed Macedonia.

AND MOTHER, I THINK OF YOU

46 Not always was Yavorov's inner world dark and impenetrable, alone in 'chaotic open spaces', filled with suffering, enslaved by doubt or in expectation of death. Quite often, when he believed that all was lost, he would discover with surprise some bright figure in the silence and darkness, a figure that along with his home and his beloved, would always lend him support. In days of disorientation or insecurity, of deep grief or joy, he would
47 always return to his reverence for this figure, worshipping it, glorifying it, crowning it with the halo of immortality. That figure was his mother.

In her eyes everything dead, everything that had col-

lapsed into the 'ruins of good and evil', would come to life. Her face radiated light, she was a mystery and a light in the dark, she was love and a hymn to the entire universe.

48 Yavorov never forgot his mother, not even in his nightmares, when his tortured spirit longed for her to sing to him as softly as she had done during his happy childhood; nor in his days as a revolutionary, when he faithfully addressed her:

'Mother, your fears that my wandering has destroyed me are in vain.'

But apparently the poet's mother was also very sensitive by nature. It seems that 'Peichou's' fate was hers as well, for on hearing a rumour that he had died in Macedonia, she had a stroke. Years later, on hearing that he was coming back from France, she was so overjoyed that she was unable to bear the strain. When the poet was shown into her room, he kneeled before her, kissing her already lifeless hand, noticing that her fingers were still stained from the yarn from which she had been weaving a rug for him. 'Peyo didn't move from Mother's bedside,' said Ekaterina, Peyo's younger sister, 'He sat by her side for nights on end, reading the Bible quietly to her.' Stupefied, bewildered and crushed by the misfortune, Yavorov was overcome by gloomy sentiments. With them, a superstitious fear entered his spirit. By a strange coincidence, at midnight he chased away an owl that screeched evilly as it flew away, and on returning to his mother's room, found that she was dead. And that is how we see her in the garden in a picture taken by an anonymous photographer. The photograph contains the poet's closest relatives, to whom he had written several letters and whom he had addressed in his poems; but his dearest one
51 was before him for the last time now. Yavorov seems to have closed his eyes in grief, carried away by the cry that was to tear from his breast:

‘ And I think of you, Mother, there
on the hard earth, in its frozen breast;
I grieve for you, mother, alone
on this ruined road... with nothing to show me the way.’

52 But through all these years, the poet was not alone. He
had by his side the ‘two beautiful eyes’ of the ‘smiling child’⁹
whose hand trembled in his, knowing not where he would
lead her. And in his fear of leaving her to face the abyss
of life, the poet again addressed his mother, or his mother’s
spirit:

‘Mother, guard over both of us!’

53 But that was evidently not enough for him, for in a
letter accompanying a poem he sent to Mina, he wrote: ‘I
prayed to her, because I knew that everything good and
precious that exists in me comes from her, and everything
bad comes from somewhere else.’ This was not merely a
poetic apotheosis, or a natural deification of his mother,
but an expression of those sound and healthy feelings that
took him out of his gloomy thoughts on the self-destruc-
tiveness of life and about non-being in *Nirvana* – a great
image that has not been rivalled in Bulgarian poetry since
then.

DAYS OF SOLITUDE

54 Yavorov’s solitude was a contradictory feeling, me-
taphysical and palpable at the same time, and it was its

⁹ Mina Todorova (1890–1910): sister of the novelist and playwright P. Yu. Todorov, whose life came to an untimely end in Chateau d’Oex, Switzerland. Mina inspired Yavorov and was his greatest inspiration. In 1910 she got peritonitis while in Paris and died at Berk Plage. She was buried at Billancourt near Paris, where her grave was purchased by her parents for eternity.

duality that filled his spirit with such inhuman suffering. When the poet sought loneliness in surreal dreams, whether they were the "eternity of the bullet" or infernal depths, it always brought him disappointment. And when he wanted to dwell on worldly forms, he was afraid of life, avoiding it and renouncing it. Finally Yavorov found solitude in love, and suddenly all that was vague and indefinable disappeared. And if he was still trying to find his isolated self, it was no longer a feeling of weightlessness, but a particular state of the mind bringing 'deeper, artistic insight.'

A few months of solitude under French skies, as he wrote to Prof. Shishmanov, was a time in which his spirit soared to unprecedented heights, captivated by 'two quiet eyes.' Yavorov was learning French in Nancy and experiencing French culture. Living right near the Pepenniere, he strolled allong its paths every day, feeling the cool breath of 'angels' wings,' producing every day poem after poem dedicated to Mina. In the centre of this park, which is associated with so many unearthly melodies to love, Yavorov had his first photograph taken abroad. In it he is standing beside Elin Pelin,¹⁰ behind them the lake which is still there today. Behind their backs is the walk which had become the romantic path of their daily strolls. Whereas here, as indeed everywhere else, Elin Pelin shows simple-heartedness and unaffectedness, Yavorov is elegant and artistic, with the bearing of one who has been chosen for the depths of his intellect. But both of them are, however, thoughtful, lonely and alien.

Ivan Danchov confirms that 'the gaiety of French life' was unable to kill the poet's silence. Ever engrossed in his thoughts, he missed Bulgaria and only livened up when

¹⁰ Elin Pelin (1877-1949): one of the masters of Bulgarian short story writing, whose works depicted the Bulgarian village at the turn of the century.

speaking of the great courtesan Thaisse played by the great opera singer Perreroles, to whom he was not indifferent, although his unfading dream was to 'join with Mina in a magic dream'.

However, Yavorov's fears for these 'two amorous eyes' were not unfounded, nor did he trouble his mother's soul without reason. Before they were able to reach the 'crowned gates' of married bliss, Mina died on the shore of the English Channel. Mihail Kremen¹¹ once wrote that during her last moments the poet was thirty kilometres away from her, but the truth is even crueller than that. From the Hotel Terrasse in Berques, just several hundred yards away from Mina, the poet phoned and begged her relations to allow him to see her. After this innocent request was turned down, again robbed by life and faithless, he returned to Paris, where he again realised he had nowhere to go. Parting forever from poetry, tormented by philosophical ideas, the poet started writing a diary dedicated to Mina, asking, unable to answer himself: 'where to now, for whom now?' However, Yavorov did not allow himself to sink into despair, nor did he exclaim as before: 'There is no solution and there is no solution.' He had discovered a new way, and again felt that he had 'artistic insight'. Writing *In the Foothills of Mount Vitosha*, the poet has left us with another photograph of himself 'under French skies', this time in the company of his close friend Todor Nikolov. Previously, he had confided that he felt himself alone as 'in a still, windless, leafless forest'. How strikingly similar his description is to this photograph. The entire Jardin de Luxembourg is white, as if icy cold, while above

¹¹ Mihail Kremen (1884-1964): a close friend of Yavorov. Initially a student at Sofia University, he continued his studies in Zagreb, Zurich and Munich. He achieved great renown by his reminiscences entitled *Yavorov's Novel*, which he wrote towards the end of his life, and the second part of which came out after his death in 1965.

61 their heads we see numberless 'leafless' branches of a comparatively early autumn. Both of them are grave, as if they have just had a serious conversation, and are at the moment looking towards a third person, alien to their world, to stand in silent grief. It is not just a moment which has been captured here. It is a stream of feelings Yavorov's eyes are not merely sad; their expression comes from a complex mind; there is no alienation, but we can see resignation to fate, seen in its inexorable inevitability.

62 At that moment, having not yet freed himself of his vision of Mina calling him 'quietly in the silence' of Billancourt, his path is again crossed by Lora,¹² in all the radiance of her strength and beauty, to remind him of what he had once written about her in *Groan*;

'There is hell and grief
and in grief is love'.

MY SOUL IS A GROAN...

63 To Lora Karavelova, Yavorov was not a 'being from another time, another world'. She saw nothing sceptical or far-away about him at their first meeting in the Dragalevtsi Monastery in 1906. Indeed, she regarded the poet as a completely down-to-earth type, and if her diary had not vanished after her suicide, we would not now attribute
64 imaginary conversations to them in which truth is replaced

¹² Lora Karavelova (1886–1913): daughter of Petko Karavelov, a prominent Bulgarian statesman in post-Liberation Bulgaria and niece of Lyuben Karavelov, an outstanding writer and revolutionary of the National Revival Period. In 1903–1905 she studied at Notre Dame de Sion in Paris, and afterwards in Antwerpen. Married Yavorov in 1912. The following year she committed suicide for deeply personal reasons. Her letters to Yavorov, published in 1935, were a major literary event at that time.

by flights of imagination. Nadya Protich, a witness to this meeting clearly remembers how naturally the two of them behaved, as if they were old acquaintances. Furthermore, it was none other than Yavorov, that 'solitary spirit', who would walk past people with 'big, soundless steps', in order to escape their notice, was the one who now sought the company of Lora, he 'called and groaned', for she was at once 'flesh and a weightless ghost'.

65 A few months before their marriage, Lora sent him two miniature photographs of herself from Paris, with the legend: 'I wait for your kisses.' In that same year, 1912, Yavorov created his only miniature portrait, based on her. Unfortunately, we do not know the content of the letter accompanying the portrait, but Lora's reaction was not slow to follow: "Read you may, but who is beside you to listen to you?" Lora was uneasy, for by Yavorov's side was Dora Konova, Mihail Kremen's 'little fiancée', whom she did not know yet. A photograph of Yavorov sent to Lora
66 in Paris allowed her to see into his character and to leave us with the truest portrait of Yavorov: '...you are before me – with your mournful, dreamy and pure eyes, with your nervous and sensitive nostrils, the disillusioned and knowledgeable folds around your lips with the rarely preserved child's outline of the lower part of your face, in which, despite your desire to die young, there is still so much yearning to see – you, who have seen everything – and to learn everything – you, who have learned all there is to learn.'

67 We have a number of portraits of Yavorov and Lora made by Dora Konova in the autumn of the same year, when both of them were in the euphoria of the 'daemonic' love in whose whirlwind they danced. At the same time, these portraits are indisputable evidence that they had moments of happiness together, a fact which many people have tried to disprove, citing the opposing nature of their characters. They reveal the end of the poet's tormented

searching, and his discovery of a quiet harbour, short-lived though it was. They contain everything that Lora dreamed
68 of in her letters to him. She was now the 'necessary joy' in the life of the poet, having found 'a moment of peace' in his eyes. The abyss of uncertainty and doubt between them had gone. By some miracle, the stream of letters from the mysterious woman B, who had been troubling the poet for years on end, suddenly stopped, without his finding out that they had in fact been written by Maria Gyulova, wife of the writer Ivan Grozev, an aunt of Mihail Kremen's aunt and the daughter of a Hungarian, Ana Kovaczs. And lastly, these portraits also emanate a
69 warmth which can be seen in his eyes and in his lips touching her hair. The claim that this tenderness appeared after their wedding is groundless. Yavorov himself informed his father that he could hardly find a 'free half-hour' for the wedding, and 'a few free minutes' to write to him before setting off for Macedônia. These photographs must have been taken before the wedding, which the very atmosphere they reveal confirms.

70 The photographer Grabner of Sofia has left us with a wonderful picture of Yavorov and Lora. They probably both liked it, because it was the portrait which they gave away most as presents. They were given, signed by Lora, to Assen Zlatarov, Mihail Kremen, and the poet's father. But in it there is a surprising severity and cold formality. A rich spiritual world has been shut far away. There is no poetic radiance, but a pure, elevated intellectuality. It contains not just strength of spirit, but an awareness of the whole complexity of life. This was their last portrait to-
71 gether. A few months later, the words which Lora had written to Yavorov in Paris, came true: 'One day, even without having loved me a lot, you will grieve deeply for my love. It is inevitable. You will see. I will buy it at any price, even at the price of not living any more.' And she bought it, at the price of Yavorov's tormented soul, of a

long, impenetrably dark night, filled with the nightmares of accusations that he had been her killer. She bought it at the price of a bullet in the inspired poet's head.

72 It was Kremen's 'little fiancée' who had helped her.

At this point, the last pages of the unpublished memoirs of Bela Kazanjieva, Dora Gabe's sister, come to mind: 'And that tiny thing, Dora Konova, succeeded in causing the downfall of one of Bulgaria's great irreplaceable treasures.'

TRAGEDY

73 In Yavorov's room, where Lora fell like a 'shot bird', there was a photograph of him with Alexander Paskalev. In this photograph, his eyes sparkled with the unquenchable fire of inspiration. Behind the face's exterior expression, we see the depths of a poetic spirit in which Paskalev saw two elements: 'A sense of beauty and a sense of humanity'.
74 The only rival to this captivating portrait is that of him as a playwright, where Yavorov stands before us in all his unique beauty as a belated romanticist. And he would have taken poetry to even greater heights, had not fate, in one fell blow, transformed him to such an extent that he actually saw himself facing death in his poem *Without Direction*:

'Blinded, I shall no more see her.
deafened, I shall no longer hear her.'

75 Suddenly loneliness, suffering and the eternal, endless night were more than just poetic visions. They came 'into life like a hurricane', to reveal to him a terrible fate which demanded supreme ordeals.

Yavorov was still in hospital, where he had just had his skull operated on, not knowing whether he was alive

or not, when a great number of his fellows, friends and acquaintances already believed him a murderer. He stood up to his treatment with 'a will of steel', bearing incredible pain, when suddenly he collapsed under the weight of the
76 'evil of the gutter' of the press, the evil which was victorious before the poet had solved the 'superhuman questions which no age has succeeded in solving'.

In the last photographs of the poet, taken by Assen Zlatarov, we see him aged beyond recognition, despondent, despairing; it seems to be someone quite different from the Yavorov who previously looks at us with the self-esteem of a creator: a 'blind man awoken, blinded forever and ever.'

In a hitherto unknown and unpublished letter, Nikolay Liliev¹³ writes in grief:

77 'Kremen, Kremen, whatever happened to Yavorov and to Lora... We have so few great people, and lose them. Above us is dark, terrible destruction. There is less and less joy left in life. What did this wild world do with them?... It poisoned them...'

But a moving portrait was painted by Tseno Todorov. With the power of his visual depiction, the artist reaches the depths of his soul, revealing the psychological make-up of Yavorov's world. 'There is no truer portrait of him from his last days,' writes Konstantin Konstantinov, 'and I have
78 never seen a more inconsolable figure, conveyed with such expression, in which human despair accumulated over the centuries screams silently at you in that helpless figure bent over in its chair and in those blind eyes.'

¹³ Nikolai Liliev (1885–1960): symbolist poet. Studied literature at Lausanne (1905–1906); and then trade in Paris (1909–1912). Was for many years playwright at the National Theatre, Sofia. Translated Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear*, Hugo's *Hernani*, Hoffmannsthal's *Electra*, and Maeterlinck's *The Miracle of St. Anthony*.

There is not a trace of the strong personality with his inspired mind which we see in Tseno Todorov's first portrait. Alone, crushed by the weight of his burden, sunk in chaotic darkness, his wounded spirit hover over 'abysses of sepulchral stillness'. Now a mystical feeling awakens in him linking him with Lora. Before Mihail Tihov, in whose house Yovorov had spent his last evening with her, he confessed: 'It is a special pleasure for me to lie on the ground, because I always feel as if I'm sinking.' This already is a glimpse 'beyond the bounds of human knowledge', the end of a great man deprived of all hope, and of all moral support.

'My hour has struck,' he wrote in his last letter. 'I am going to join Mother and Lora. I am greatly tormented and have no reason to delay... there is no purpose in falling to the level of a beggar or being sent to the mad-house. Father, your son, and sister, your brother is dying in innocence, preserving his dignity as a man and a poet.' These lines are not a gesture before death or the usual expression of love for one's relations, but a cry against the falsity of the world, a cry of protest from a Golgotha uttered by an immaculate artist in the field of Bulgarian poetry.

1977

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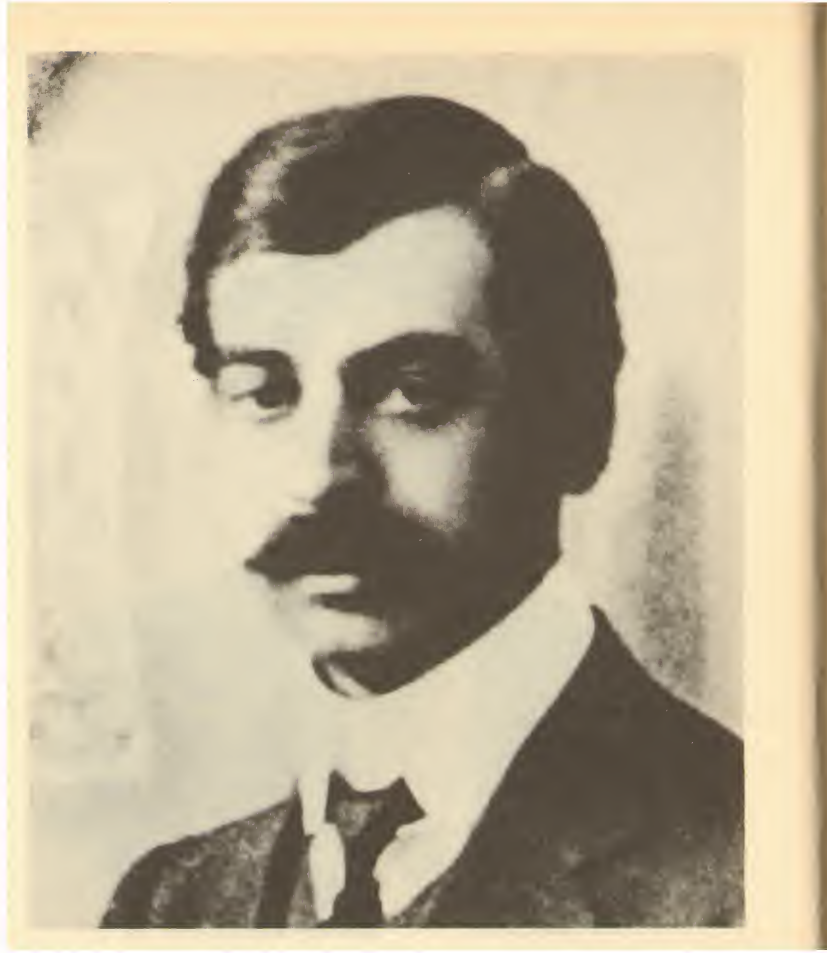


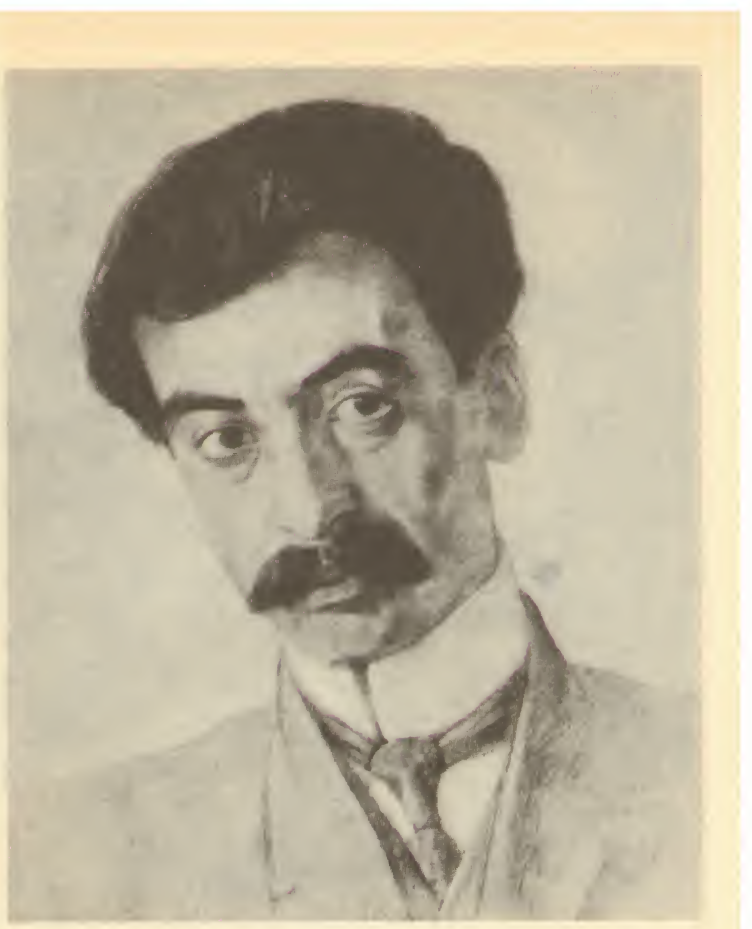


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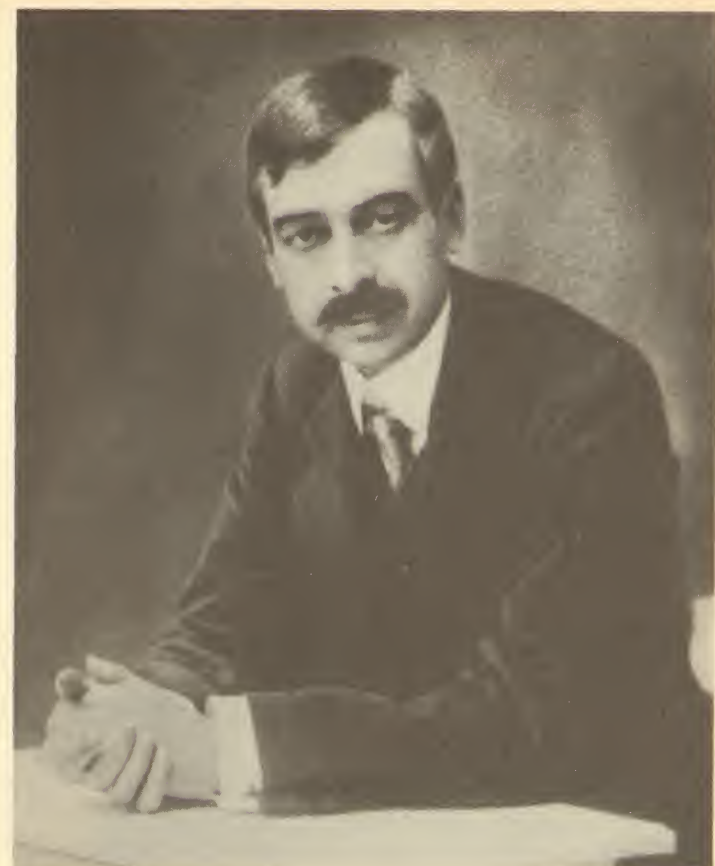
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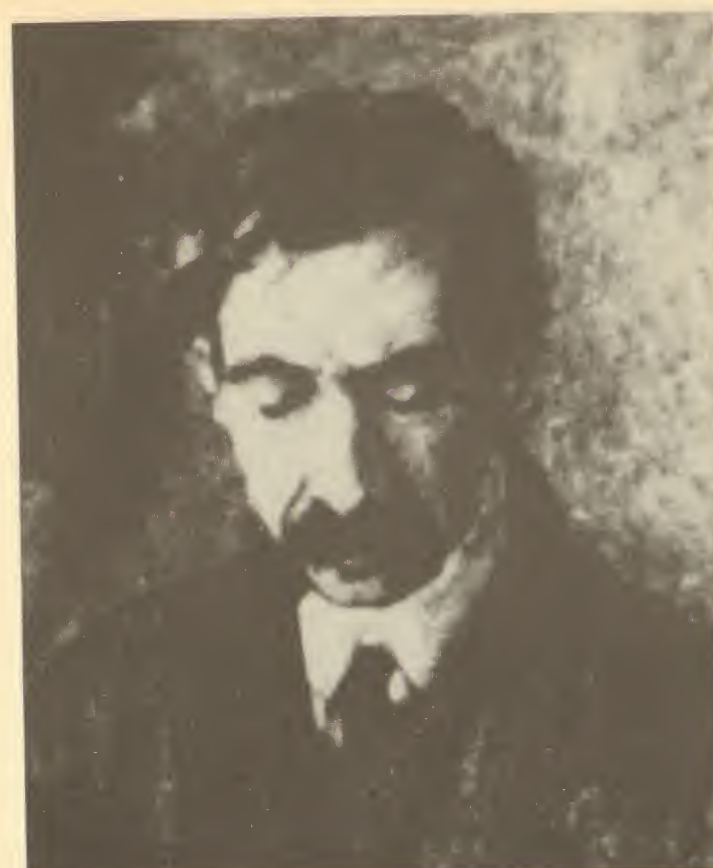






След няколко месеца ще се събднат думите на Лора, пи-





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Кремен, Кремен, какво стана Яворов, Лора... Толкова малко хора имаме и ги губим. Над нас е страшното и тъмно крушение. Все по-малко радост остава в живота. Какво правеше дивият свят с тях?... Той ги отрови...

Николай Лилив